

Vermont Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group

Summary of Meeting #30: Tuesday, October 4, 2022

More detailed information, including any presentation slides and the meeting recording can be found at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/pes>.

Introduction

The Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Soil Health Working Group held its thirtieth meeting on Tuesday, October 4, 2022. The objectives of the meeting were to debrief paths forward and options for the pilot program presented at the September 20 meeting and plan constituency outreach for October.

Summary of discussion

Working Group members were made aware of a DEC RFP related to a [“Review of Agricultural Sector Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sequestration in Vermont”](#) and a USDA-NRCS grant opportunity related to [soil carbon monitoring](#).

Working Group members reviewed the results of a poll taken by members or their alternates. The purpose of the poll was to get a “temperature check” of the Working Group’s preferences for the several paths and options presented at the previous meeting. Several members reflected that the poll results did not express a clear direction about whether the pilot program should develop a new program, enhance existing technical assistance, or supplement existing state & federal programs. Farmers noted that the Working Group has deviated from its initial focus (though it may not be right to invest in a program that is not yet ready) and highlighted that the Working Group needs to have a clear definition of “biodiversity.” Investment in baseline capacity for technical assistance can help make providers’ more effective. At the same time, NRCS has been unable to meet a great deal of funding need (and over the past year received more requests than they had funds for). NRCS also strives to make their programs easier to understand and more accessible, especially for small producers.

Working Group members were also reminded that the \$1 million appropriated in the FY 2022 budget will need to be spent or obligated before July 1, 2023 (with stipulations),¹ and that the Legislature charged the Working Group to compile a report with a clear list of [recommendations](#) for a PES program. There was also the idea of using the appropriation to fund several smaller pilots.

Working Group members plan to conduct outreach to their constituencies in October. They will present a common slideshow and will also collect feedback via a poll. There is a desire to not repeat information already asked of farmers in the UVM Task 3 survey.

Working Group members were also reminded that VAAFM has received feedback from farmers about data interoperability and unease from farmers around having too much of their information available to

¹ Act 185 of 2022 appropriated “\$1,000,000 for the development of an agricultural Payment for Ecosystems Services Program to support the work of the Payment for Ecosystem Services and Soil Health Working Group (PES WG) ... to enable Payment for Ecosystem Services Program development to retain facilitation services, contract identified research needs, fund pilot program development, and deliver payments to farmers for quantified ecosystem services.”

certain entities. Members were also made aware of several forthcoming federal funding opportunities that a PES program could leverage, along with general support for performance-based payments in the forthcoming Farm Bill.

Public comment included comments in support of protections for soil as basic infrastructure and a request to share follow-up materials with committed non-Working Group members.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 PM.

Links shared

1. [Request for Proposals: Review of Agricultural Sector Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sequestration in Vermont](#), Vermont DEC
2. [News Release: USDA to Invest \\$8 Million to Expand Monitoring of Soil Carbon](#), USDA-NRCS
3. [Permit Navigator](#), Vermont DEC
4. [Act No. 185 of 2022](#), see Sec. B.1100(a)(7)(A) for the \$1 million appropriation for the PES & Soil Health Working Group
5. [PES Working Group Extended by Act 129 of 2020](#), VAAFM
6. [Assistance for Agricultural Producers](#), Franklin County NRCD
7. [Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities Project Summaries](#), USDA